

U.S. and Coalition Military Operations in Afghanistan: Issues for Congress

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Summary

The U.S. military has been involved in Afghanistan since the fall of 2001 when Operation Enduring Freedom toppled the Taliban regime and attacked the Al Qaeda terrorist network hosted by the Taliban. A significant U.S. military presence in the country could continue for many years as U.S., North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Coalition, and Afghan National Army (ANA) forces attempt to stabilize the country by defeating the insurgency, facilitating reconstruction, and combating Afghanistan's illegal drug trade. Despite NATO's assumption of command of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), the United States will remain the largest troop contributing nation and will continue Operation Enduring Freedom, intended to locate and destroy insurgents and terrorists operating in Afghanistan. Acting on a 2006 request by NATO senior leaders for additional troops, the United States, Great Britain, and possibly Poland will together send approximately 6,000 additional troops to help combat insurgents. Insurgent activity continues to evolve, with some of the tactics and techniques being used by Afghan insurgents reportedly similar to those employed in Iraq. Reports suggest that instead of building a 70,000 soldier Afghan National Army as agreed to in the 2002 Bonn Conference, the Administration intends to support a 50,000 soldier force, while some Afghan officials suggest that a 150,000 man Afghan National Army will be needed to insure both internal and external security. Senior U.S. officials have also stated that the Afghan National Army needs to be significantly better equipped if it is to become an effective security force.

Despite the efforts of the Coalition and Afghan government, poppy production in 2006 significantly surpassed last year's crop and reported cooperation between drug lords and insurgents has added a new dimension and possible complications to efforts to combat the insurgents and the growing drug trade. The possible involvement of Afghan government and police officials in protecting drug traffickers, in concert with NATO's and the United States' indirect involvement in counternarcotics efforts, calls into question the Coalition's ability to stem the illegal opium trade that helps to finance insurgent operations.

The 110th Congress, in its oversight role, may choose to examine the sufficiency of U.S. and NATO forces, the impact of an evolving insurgency, NATO's operations against insurgents, the size, proficiency, and equipping of the Afghan National Army, and the effectiveness of counternarcotics operations. This report will be updated as events warrant.

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Current U.S. Forces

According to the Department of Defense (DOD), as of March 1, 2007 there were approximately 25,000 U.S. service members in Afghanistan.¹ The majority of U.S. combat forces composing the 7th OEF rotation to Afghanistan were from the Fort Drum, NY-based 3rd Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, which constituted the division's third year-long deployment to Afghanistan in five years.² About 5,800 troops from the division's 3rd Brigade, as well as Division Headquarters and other supporting units are from Fort Drum, while another 1,300 soldiers are from the division's 4th Brigade, stationed at Fort Polk, LA. There are also an unknown number of U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) personnel from all services that are part of the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force that is conducting special operations missions in and around Afghanistan. The 10th Mountain Division—less 3rd Brigade—is in the process of being replaced by the division headquarters of the Fort Bragg, NC-based 82nd Airborne Division and the division's 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team.

Aside from naval and air force special operations forces, U.S. Navy and Air Force service members are playing an increased role in ground operations in Afghanistan.³ Six of the twelve U.S.-led Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) are commanded by naval officers and 140 sailors are now serving on U.S. PRTs. The other six U.S. PRTs are led by Air Force officers and are made up of both soldiers and airmen.

Tour Extension and Modification

On January 25, 2007, DOD announced that the 3,200-member 3rd Brigade, 10th Mountain Division—which reportedly had already begun to redeploy advance elements back to Ft. Drum⁴—would be extended in Afghanistan for up to 120 days.⁵ On February 14, 2007, DOD announced that they were diverting the Vincenza, Italy-based 173rd Airborne Brigade from an upcoming deployment to Iraq and would instead deploy the brigade's 3,200 soldiers to Afghanistan in the spring of 2007.⁶ The 173rd Airborne Brigade will serve as the 3rd Brigade, 10th Mountain Division's replacement when that brigade redeploys to Ft. Drum, NY sometime in

¹ DOD Information Paper "Congressional Research Service Request for Boots on the Ground (BOG) Statistics for Iraq and Afghanistan," March 1, 2007.

² William Kates, "10th Mountain Division Deploys," *Army Times*, Jan. 27, 2006.

³ Information in this section is from Kate Wiltout, "Navy's Role in Afghanistan Grows," *Norfolk Virginian-Pilot*, May 21, 2006.

⁴ John Kifner, "Last-Minute Extension in Afghanistan for Units Whose Bags Were Packed," *New York Times*, February 16, 2007.

⁵ DOD News Release, "DOD Announces Afghanistan Force Adjustment," No. 088-07, January 25, 2007.

⁶ DOD News Release, "DOD Announces Afghanistan Force Rotation," No. 177-07, February 14, 2007.

May 2007.⁷ On March 11, 2007 it was reported that the Administration plans to send an additional 3,500-soldier brigade to Afghanistan “to accelerate training of local forces.”⁸

Non-U.S. Coalition Forces in Afghanistan

Non-U.S. Coalition forces in Afghanistan are distributed between the U.S.-led Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)—which conducts counterterror and counterinsurgency operations—and the NATO-led International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF), which provides security and reconstruction support for all of Afghanistan. In October 2006, NATO assumed command of ISAF and all security operations in Afghanistan—including OEF (OEF’s U.S. commander serves as a deputy ISAF commander). Some countries contribute forces to both OEF and ISAF, while others contribute strictly to ISAF. At present, 21 nations contribute approximately 3,100 troops to OEF⁹ while the United States contributes about 9,600 troops to OEF.¹⁰ Thirty seven NATO and non-NATO nations contribute about 36,000 troops to ISAF.¹¹ According to U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM), the United States contributes approximately 15,800 troops to support ISAF.¹²

ISAF X

On February 4, 2007 a composite headquarters assumed command of ISAF’s tenth rotation previously held by NATO’s Allied Command Europe Rapid Reaction Corps (ARRC).¹³ The 1,000-strong headquarters is commanded by U.S. Army General Dan McNeill—the highest ranking U.S. officer to command in Afghanistan—and will command ISAF and OEF forces until February 2008.¹⁴

Allied Troop Issues

Despite repeated requests by the U.S. government and NATO commanders in Afghanistan for additional troops as well as the removal of national caveats that limit the utility of NATO forces—primarily German, French, Italian, Spanish, and Turkish forces—many NATO members have rejected sending additional forces or even modifying how their forces are employed.¹⁵ Poland is still expected to provide an additional 1,000 troops sometime in early 2007. While some maintain that forces that are not permitted to participate in offensive operations are of little value and put an unfair burden on U.S., British, Canadian, and Dutch forces that are actively involved

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Peter Baker, “Additional Troop Increase Approved,” *Washington Post*, March 11, 2007.

⁹ NATO Fact Sheet, “International Security Assistance Force: ISAF Regional Commands and PRT Locations,” February 7, 2007.

¹⁰ Information provided by U.S. Central Command Legislative Liaison, February 28, 2007.

¹¹ NATO International Security Assistance Force Fact Sheet, February 7, 2007.

¹² Information provided by U.S. Central Command Legislative Liaison, February 28, 2007.

¹³ Nicholas Fiorenza, “ISAF X Takes Over From ARRC,” *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, February 14, 2007, p. 10.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Helene Cooper, “NATO Allies Wary of Sending More Troops to Afghanistan,” *New York Times*, January 27, 2007; Thom Shanker, “NATO Asked to Meet Promises Already Made to Afghanistan,” *New York Times*, February 9, 2007; and Gareth Harding, “Member’s Skirting Military Duty Irks NATO Leadership,” *Washington Times*, February 13, 2007.

in combat, others argue that these forces—even with their caveats—help to provide security that is needed to facilitate reconstruction.

Continued German Presence?¹⁶

Despite German plans to send 500 additional troops and six Tornado reconnaissance planes to augment the 3,000 German troops already serving with ISAF, reports suggest that opposition is growing in Germany over its expanding military role in Afghanistan. This opposition has been heightened by the recent murder of a German aid worker and the abduction of two other German workers by insurgents. Increasing German public and political opposition to military participation in Afghanistan could make it highly unlikely that the German government will rescind national caveats and adopt a more offensive posture as called for by NATO and the United States. In light of this apparent growing opposition, NATO and U.S. officials might reconsider calling for a more offensive role for German forces, as such pressure could increase German political opposition and result in a reduction of German military participation in Afghanistan.

1,400 Additional British Troops

Reports maintain that in response to a lack of commitment by other NATO nations to provide additional forces, Great Britain will deploy an additional 1,400 soldiers to Helmand province by the summer of 2007, bringing the British troop level in Afghanistan to 7,700.¹⁷ This new battle group will be comprised of units from 1st Battalion, Royal Welsh Fusiliers, 1st Battalion, Scots Guards, 5th Regiment, Royal Artillery, and 39th Regiment, Royal Artillery.¹⁸

Norwegian Special Forces

The Norwegian government has reportedly committed to deploy a 150-soldier special forces unit to Afghanistan but, in deference to political opposition within the Norwegian government, this unit will be restricted to operating in and around Kabul—despite a NATO request that the unit be permitted to operate in southern Afghanistan.¹⁹ In addition to the special forces unit, Norway contributes 550 soldiers in northern Afghanistan as part of a quick reaction force and a Provincial Reconstruction Team.²⁰

Additional Contributions²¹

The Czech Republic will increase its strength from 120 to 255, deploying a field hospital, a military police unit, and a chemical defense unit. Latvia will increase its troop strength from 30 to 100 and Lithuania, which already has 130 soldiers in Afghanistan will deploy a 55-man special forces unit during the summer of 2007. Even with the addition of the aforementioned troops and

¹⁶ Information in this section is from Mariah Blake, “Germany Rethinks its Afghan Presence,” *Christian Science Monitor*, March 22, 2007.

¹⁷ “UK to Boost Afghan Force by 1,400,” BBC News, February 26, 2007 and Courtney French, “More Troops Headed to Afghanistan,” *Washington Times*, February 24, 2007.

¹⁸ “UK to Boost Afghan Force by 1,400,” BBC News, February 26, 2007.

¹⁹ John Berg, “NATO Forces Face Showdown Over Afghanistan,” *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, February 14, 2007, p. 5 and John Berg, “Crisis Looms in Norway Over Deployment of Special Forces,” *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, February 21, 2007, p. 13.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Information in this section is taken from a NATO Statement on Further National Contributions to NATO’s ISAF Mission by General John Craddock, March 9, 2007.

additional troops from the United States, Poland, the United Kingdom, and Norway, NATO's Supreme Commander, U.S. Army General John Craddock, still believes that NATO needs "another one or two combat battalions (a battalion averages about 650 soldiers) in Afghanistan."²²

Recent Military Operations

NATO/Afghan National Army Ambush Insurgents²³

In what was described as the "first major engagement of 2007" and "the largest battle since September 2006," as many as 150 Taliban insurgents were killed when they were ambushed by NATO and Afghan forces as the insurgents crossed the Pakistani border into Afghanistan on January 11, 2007. Reports maintain that two large groups of insurgents were initially spotted gathering on the Pakistan side of the border near the Afghan Barmal district of Paktika Province. With what was described as "close co-operation with Pakistani authorities in monitoring the insurgents before they entered Afghanistan," NATO tracked insurgent vehicles loaded with men and equipment as they crossed into Afghanistan, and NATO and Afghan forces ambushed the insurgents in a deserted area about one half mile inside of Afghanistan. The ambush consisted of ground and air attacks and several trucks carrying arms and ammunition were also destroyed or captured.

Operation Achilles²⁴

On March 6, 2007 NATO and Afghan forces launched "Operation Achilles" in Helmand Province. The immediate goal of the operation—which will eventually involve 4,500 U.S., British, Canadian, and Dutch troops and 1,000 Afghan soldiers—is to secure the road leading to the Kajaki dam which has been described as a strategically important hydro-electric project. Taliban attacks against British forces providing security for the dam have precluded international aid work on the hydro-electric plant that provides electricity to about 1.7 million Afghans in the region. Longer term goals for Operation Achilles include bringing security to northern Helmand province and addressing the region's narcotics trafficking. NATO and Afghan officials maintain that about 700 insurgents have moved into the Helmand region and are posturing themselves to conduct attacks—including suicide attacks. More than 1,000 U.S. soldiers from the 4th Brigade, 82nd Airborne Division are participating in the early phases of Operation Achilles in an attempt to not only bring security to the Helmand region, but also to disrupt Taliban preparations for an anticipated spring offensive.

Some analysts maintain that this latest NATO operation will face two significant challenges—a comparatively low number of NATO troops and its inability to pursue Taliban insurgents to their bases in Pakistan.²⁵ U.S. officials suggest that any Afghan-centric military operation can only damage and not destroy Taliban forces that retreat to Pakistan to recruit and rearm its forces for future operations in Afghanistan.

²² Thom Shanker, "NATO Stepping Up Aid to Afghan Drug War," *International Herald Tribune*, March 3, 2007.

²³ Information in this section is taken from "NATO Kills 150 Taleban Fighters," BBC News, January 11, 2007; "As Many as 150 Afghan Militants Killed," MSNBC.com, January 12, 2007; and Abdul Waheed Wafa, "NATO Says Afghan Class May Have Killed Scores of Rebels," *New York Times*, January 12, 2007.

²⁴ Information in this section is taken from "NATO in Major Anti-Taleban Drive," BBC News, March 6, 2007 and Griff Witte, "NATO Offensive Targets Taliban in S. Afghanistan," *Washington Post*, March 7, 2007.

²⁵ Paul Wiseman, "NATO Enters Afghan Drug Region," *USA Today*, March 12, 2007.

U.S. Marine Special Operations Unit Sent Home by U.S. Commander

A 120 Marine Special Operations Company from the Second Marine Special Operations Battalion from Camp Lejeune, N.C. was reportedly sent home by U.S. commanders for its response to a March 4, 2007 incident where elements of the unit were ambushed by a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device and the Marines responded by killing as many as 10 civilians and wounding about 34 more.²⁶ This was the first combat deployment of the recently-activated Marine special operations unit which had only been in Afghanistan for a few weeks out of a scheduled six month deployment and military officials have supposedly initiated an official investigation into the incident.²⁷ U.S. military officials claim that the unit was sent home as it could no longer work in a counterinsurgency role because it had damaged the unit's relationship with the local population but some suggest that sending an entire unit home—particularly one as highly trained as a special operations unit—is highly unusual and perhaps indicative of deeper problems with the unit.²⁸

Pakistani Military Operations

Pakistani military operations in its Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) as well as along the Pakistan-Afghan border, continue to play a significant role in combating the insurgency in Afghanistan. While many U.S. officials praise Pakistan's military activities, some U.S. and Afghan officials question if Pakistan is doing enough in combating Taliban insurgents. Reports also continue to suggest that Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence Agency is actively conducting training camps for insurgents and supporting jihadist madrassahs (religious schools) along the Afghan-Pakistan border.²⁹ Pakistan has indicated that it would close four refugee camps along the border to prevent their use by insurgents and narco-traffickers and would add up to 938 border posts throughout the mountainous border region in increase intelligence activities and to tighten government control in the region.³⁰ Pakistani officials indicated that the Afghan government has only about 100 border posts.³¹ Pakistan has supposedly started to issue biometric cards to monitor border crossings by people and traffic alike.³²

Border Fence³³

Reports suggest that the Pakistani government will shortly begin construction of a border fence along parts of its 1,500 mile shared border with Afghanistan. In addition to erecting fencing and barbed wire, Pakistan also plans to emplace landmines to deter illegal border-crossers. Pakistani officials reportedly claim that the fences and mines will not be used at legal border crossings but will instead be placed on routes used by insurgents and drug traffickers. The Afghan government's response has been characterized as largely negative and some suggest that relations between the two countries have been further eroded. The Afghan government reportedly

²⁶ Rowan Scarborough, "Top General in Afghanistan Expels Marines," *The Examiner*, March 23, 2007 and "U.S. Pulls Marines Out of Afghanistan," *New York Times*, March 23, 2007; David S. Cloud, "U.S. Military Opens Inquiry Into Whether Marines Killed 10 Afghans After Attack on Convoy," *New York Times*, March 24, 2007.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ "Pakistan's Dangerous Afghanistan Policy," *Jane's Intelligence Digest*, Nov. 3, 2006.

³⁰ Bill Gertz, "Pakistan Will Close Four Camps to Foil Afghan Terror," *Washington Times*, January 16, 2007.

³¹ Nicholas Fiorenza, "Pakistan Moves on Insurgent Flow," *Jane's Defense Weekly*, February 21, 2007, p. 16.

³² Ibid.

³³ Information in this section is taken from Pamela Constable, "Afghan-Pakistani Bond Steadily Deteriorating," *Washington Post*, January 7, 2007.

believes that the fence and mines would arbitrarily divide the Pashtun tribes that live on both sides of the border and the use of mines would invoke “bad memories” of the hundreds of thousands of landmines laid during 25 years of conflict—first by the Soviets in the 1980s and later by warring Afghan militias in the 1990s. The United Nations and other international groups have spent millions of dollars to remove these mines and many areas still contain mines from the 80s and 90s.

Insurgent Tactics and Operations

Insurgent tactics and operations against Coalition forces continue to evolve, and some maintain that they are becoming increasingly like the tactics employed in Iraq. U.S. military officials have noted that cross-border attacks against U.S. and Afghan forces have increased significantly since September 2006, when Pakistan signed a pact with tribal groups in the border region.³⁴ According to officials, in the two months before the agreement, there were 40 cross-border attacks in Khost and Paktika provinces, but in the two months after the agreement, there were 140 attacks. U.S. military intelligence officials also provided statistics detailing the increase in insurgent attacks. In 2005, there were a reported 27 suicide attacks and in 2006, there were 139 attacks. In 2005, there were 783 road side bombs and in 2006, there were 1,677. The insurgents conducted 4,542 direct attacks (attacks using small arms, grenades and other weapons) in 2006, as compared to 1,558 such attacks in 2005.

Taliban insurgents reportedly seized control of two towns in southern and southwestern Afghanistan, largely attributed to a lack of presence of NATO forces. On February 1, 2007, the town of Musa Qala in Helmand province was taken over by Taliban forces.³⁵ About five months earlier, British forces vacated the town and handed over responsibility for its security to a tribal council and local police forces. On February 19, 2007, Taliban forces seized a district in southwestern Afghanistan. The attack occurred in the Baqwa district of Farah province where few NATO and Afghan troops are deployed.³⁶ It is not known if Taliban forces have retained control of Baqwa district or have left the area.

Taliban Spring Offensive?

Reports vary as to insurgent troop strength and their ability to mount a spring offensive. One senior Taliban commander maintains that there 8,000 to 9,000 “fighters” in Helmand province alone presently opposing NATO’s Operation Achilles and ready to participate in a “spring offensive.”³⁷ While some NATO military officials maintain that the Taliban are fully capable of mounting a large-scale spring offensive—noting an increase in attacks as the weather has begun to improve,³⁸ others suggest that the Taliban is too weak for a new offensive, having been

³⁴ Information in this section is taken from David R. Sands, “Strikes on U.S., Afghan Forces Up Fourfold,” *Washington Times*, January 17, 2007 and David S. Cloud, “U.S. Says Attacks are Surging in Afghanistan,” *New York Times*, January 17, 2007.

³⁵ Information in this section is taken from “Taleban Forces Retake Afghan Town,” BBC News, February 2, 2007 and Carlotta Gall and Taimoor Shah, “Afghan Town is Overrun by Taliban,” *New York Times*, February 3, 2007.

³⁶ Abdul Waheed Wafa, “Taliban Seize Rural District in Southwest as Police Flee,” *New York Times*, February 20, 2007.

³⁷ Noor Khan, “Taliban: 4,000 Fighters Ready for NATO Attack,” Associated Press, March 7, 2007.

³⁸ Laura King, “Taliban Offensive Expected in the Spring,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 18, 2007 and “Signs of Taliban Offensive Emerge,” *Miami Herald*, March 3, 2007.

significantly degraded in the NATO campaigns of late 2006.³⁹ While the Taliban might have been weakened by the campaigns of 2006, a recent cross border attack against U.S. Fire Base Tillman in Paktika Province on March 24—where 12 militants were killed in the fighting—seems to indicate that the insurgents are still willing and capable of directly confronting U.S. and Coalition forces.⁴⁰

Provincial Reconstruction Teams⁴¹

PRTs are small, civil-military teams designed to extend the authority of the Afghan central government beyond Kabul and to facilitate aid and reconstruction projects. PRTs have enabled coalition forces to extend a degree of security to outlying regions and have also permitted U.S. forces to establish personal relationships with local Afghan leaders which some believe has helped to diminish insurgent influence in a number of regions. As of February 7, 2007, ISAF had 25 PRTs operational—12 of which were U.S. teams.⁴²

Composition of U.S. PRTs

U.S. PRTs consist of between 50 and 100 military and civilian personnel.⁴³ Civilian personnel usually consist of a U.S. State Department representative, a U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) representative, and a representative from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). There is also usually an Afghan representative from the Ministry of the Interior on the PRT. In terms of military personnel, each PRT has a commander, two civil affairs teams with four members each, operational and administrative staff, and force protection elements—usually a platoon-sized (40 soldier) force.

The Afghan National Army (ANA)

Training of the ANA commenced shortly after U.S. and Coalition forces defeated Taliban forces in early 2002. The Bonn II Conference on rebuilding Afghanistan in December 2002 endorsed a 70,000 strong Afghan National Army.⁴⁴ Part of ISAF's mission is "supporting and helping to train the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) to a standard that will enable them in time to assume full responsibility for the internal and external security of the country."⁴⁵

The ANA has been considered a relatively competent force, but one whose performance varies from very good to very poor, dependent to a large extent on the leadership of the particular unit. Recent reports suggest that the ANA continues to improve its proficiency, with some suggesting that the ANA "outperforms" the better-equipped Iraqi security forces.⁴⁶ Some military officials

³⁹ "NATO: Taliban Too Weak for New Offensive," *USA Today*, February 1, 2007.

⁴⁰ "Forces Thwart Insurgent Attack in Afghanistan," American Forces Press Services, March 25, 2007.

⁴¹ For detailed information on PRTs, to include specific information on each PRT, see CRS Report RL30588, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy*, by Kenneth Katzman.

⁴² NATO Fact Sheet, "International Security Assistance Force: ISAF Regional Commands and PRT Locations," February 7, 2007.

⁴³ Information in this section is taken from a United States Joint Forces Command Report, "Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan—An Interagency Assessment," April 26, 2006. [Available from author to congressional clients upon request]

⁴⁴ Joshua Kucera, "Afghanistan Looks to Army Expansion," *Jane's Defense Weekly*, October 13, 2004, p. 6.

⁴⁵ ISAF Commander's Intent, ISAF IX, http://www.jfcbs.nato.int/ISAF/mission/mission_operations.htm, October 9, 2006.

⁴⁶ Information in this section is taken from "Ill-Equipped Afghan Army Outperforms Iraq's," *Arizona Daily Star*,

believe that the ANA could defend Afghanistan without U.S. and NATO support in ten years or less. U.S. military officials maintain that more than two dozen ANA battalions are capable of conducting operations “on their own with minimal support” from U.S. or coalition forces. Some credit the ethnic diversity of the ANA and its training curriculum—which includes literacy, writing, and language training—as key factors in the ANA’s growing efficacy.

A 50,000 Soldier Afghan National Army?⁴⁷

One report suggests that the Administration now supports the creation of a 50,000 soldier ANA as opposed to the 70,000 soldier force that the United States and other countries agreed to at the Bonn II Conference in December 2002 and later reaffirmed at the London Conference on Afghan Reconstruction. The Pentagon reportedly believes that Afghanistan will be unable to support a 70,000 soldier force and that Afghanistan won’t even be able to pay for a 50,000 soldier force until 2063. The Afghan government reportedly opposes a reduction to a 50,000 soldier force and U.S. military officials acknowledge that a 50,000 soldier force would mean that the Afghan government would have to accept a greater degree of risk.

A 150,000 Afghan National Army Needed?

According to the Afghan Defense Minister, Abdul Rahim Wardak, the Afghan National Army needs at least 150,000 troops to secure the country.⁴⁸ The Defense Minister reportedly suggests that a 70,000 member ANA—which is still three years away—could not end surging Taliban violence and protect the country from outside threats. Mr. Wardak maintains that this force must be well-trained and equipped with sufficient mobility and firepower as well as logistical and training institutions.

Equipping the Afghan National Army

Equipping the Afghan National Army continues to be described as “inadequate.” In a recent report, the following observations were made by a retired U.S. Army general:

They [ANA] have no real national logistics or maintenance system. The ANA has, for all practical purposes, no air power—neither helicopter or fixed wing. We should, in my view, have a five year program to equip them with 100-plus Blackhawks [UH-60 helicopter] (some equipped as gunships), 25-plus Chinooks [CH-47 helicopter], and two dozen C-130s [transport aircraft]/AC-130s [fire support aircraft]. They have no high speed, wheeled light armor (they should have three battalions of Stryker combat vehicles). They have junk small arms and should be equipped with U.S. Army modern automatic weapons. They lack body armor. They lack deployable, modern mortars and light artillery (this has been an absolute key to keeping U.S. Army combat units alive along the eastern frontier).⁴⁹

February 20, 2007 and Tim Kilbride, “As Afghan Troops Build Capacity, Decisive Battles Loom,” American Forces Press Service, March 2, 2007.

⁴⁷ Information in this section is taken from Vance Serchuk, “Don’t Undercut the Afghan Army,” *Washington Post*, June 2, 2006.

⁴⁸ Information in this section is taken from “Gloomy Assessment by Afghan Defense Minister,” *New York Times*, July 13, 2006.

⁴⁹ After Action Report—General Barry R. McCaffery, USA (Retired), “Visit to Afghanistan and Pakistan 16-23 February 2007, February 26, 2007, p. 4.

While the provision of helicopter, transport aircraft, armored vehicles, and artillery would likely significantly enhance the ANA's combat capabilities, significant maintenance and logistical support would be required to sustain these systems—a capacity that is, at present, lacking.

Some equipment is being provided to the Afghan National Army. On February 1, 2007, the United States handed over 12,000 heavy and light weapons and 800 High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicles (HMMWVs) and trucks to the ANA.⁵⁰ NATO states that it has provided the ANA over 50,000 light weapons, 110 armored personnel carriers, 12 helicopters and millions of rounds of ammunition⁵¹ although it is not known if these figures include contributions from the United States.

Counternarcotics Operations⁵²

Increased Poppy Production in 2006

According to the U.N., 2006 opium cultivation in Afghanistan rose 59% over 2005 levels, with expected revenues exceeding \$3 billion.⁵³ The number of people involved in opium cultivation increased by almost a third to 2.9 million—approximately 12% of Afghanistan's total population.⁵⁴ In its report, the U.N. suggests that—particularly in Helmand and Kandahar provinces—NATO and the ANA combine its counterinsurgency and counternarcotics efforts to stop “the vicious circle of drugs funding terrorist and terrorists protecting drug traffickers.”⁵⁵

Some Afghan government officials maintain that former commanders and warlords that have become district chiefs and local police chiefs under the new Afghan central government and are involved in the drug trade.⁵⁶ Some experts suggest that since the fall of the Taliban in 2001 and because of Coalition and government pressure, that major Afghan drug traffickers:

Have used their wealth and influence to establish complex systems of protection, systematically targeting government and law enforcement institutions for corruption by paying some officials at all levels to allow them to continue their business and by purchasing positions within institutions.⁵⁷

If these systems have been developed within Afghan government institutions to protect and perpetuate the illegal Afghan drug trade, NATO and U.S. military actions designed to combat the Afghan opium trade and disrupt its financial ties to Taliban insurgents may prove to be ineffective. The Afghan national government continues to resist U.S. pressure for aerial eradication of opium-producing poppies but has renewed its ground-based eradication efforts, hoping to destroy some 123,550 acres before the poppy harvest begins in April.⁵⁸

⁵⁰ “Afghan Military Gets Arms, Trucks, From the U.S.,” *Washington Post*, February 2, 2007.

⁵¹ NATO Fact Sheet on NATO's Assistance in Training and Equipping the Afghan National Army updated February 8, 2007.

⁵² For a more detailed discussion see CRS Report RL32686, *Afghanistan: Narcotics and U.S. Policy*, by Christopher M. Blanchard.

⁵³ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “Afghanistan Opium Survey 2006 Executive Summary, September 2006, p.iv.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Pamela Constable, “A Poor Yield for Afghan's War on Drugs,” *Washington Post*, September 19, 2006.

⁵⁷ “The Changing Structure of the Afghan Opium Trade,” *Jane's Intelligence Review*, September 2006, p. 6.

⁵⁸ Noor Khan, Afghans Move to Eradicate Opium, Destroying Fields in Taliban Region,” *Boston Globe*,

U.S. and NATO's Role in Countering Drugs

While NATO's supreme commander has reportedly ordered NATO commanders in Afghanistan to "increase their assistance to local counternarcotics authorities," he also reiterated that "NATO was not authorized to play a direct role in the anti-narcotics effort," and could only supply intelligence and security and logistical assistance.⁵⁹ Some question if more direct NATO involvement in Afghan counternarcotics efforts could achieve better results but additional troops would likely be required for a more direct role in counternarcotics operations.

Issues for Congress

Adequacy of Forces?

Congress might examine the adequacy of forces—both U.S. and NATO—in terms of their ability to successfully prosecute combat operations against a Taliban insurgency that has evolved in terms of tactics and its ability to conduct coordinated, relatively large-scale military operations. One issue that might be explored is that of national caveats that limit the usefulness of some nation's military forces. It can be argued that because many NATO nations significantly restrict their force's operations that a disproportionate burden is being placed on NATO countries that do not restrict how their forces are used in Afghanistan. Such a disparity could also conceivably result in a rift between NATO forces that participate in combat operations and those forces that are restricted from participating—a rift that insurgents might choose to exploit. While it is possible that these national caveats have resulted in requirements for additional forces that can participate in combat operations it can be argued that forces subject to national caveats are playing a vital role in Afghanistan by virtue of their presence, which affords a degree of security and enables relief and reconstruction efforts.

Can NATO Sustain or Increase Its Current Force Levels?

As part of any discourse on the adequacy of NATO forces in Afghanistan, Congress might also consider NATO's ability to sustain current force levels in Afghanistan or increase these levels if the situation requires. Of particular concern, is the "pass the hat" manner in which NATO obtains its forces from member countries which likely makes any sort of long-term planning difficult at best. NATO's 2006 request for an additional 2,000 to 2,500 combat soldiers is considered by some as illustrative of these difficulties. Because of what some call a lack of commitment by many NATO members, the United States and Great Britain were compelled to provide the majority of reinforcements needed to meet the growing security threat posed by the Taliban insurgents and narcotics traffickers.

Why Was the U.S. Marine Special Operations Unit Asked to Leave Afghanistan?

Congress may decide to examine the specific events that lead to the expulsion of the Marine Special Operations Company. One report suggests that after the ambush, some Afghan witnesses stated that "the Marines fired recklessly at passing vehicles and pedestrians along the crowded

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⁵⁹ Thom Shanker, "NATO Stepping Up Aid to Afghan Drug War," *International Herald Tribune*, March 3, 2007.

road flanked by shops.”⁶⁰ Such a reaction by a unit reportedly “composed of some of the most experienced, highly trained Marines—including many experts in reconnaissance and marksmanship,”⁶¹ is considered by some to be highly unusual for a supposedly elite and highly disciplined unit.

The Evolving Insurgency

Five years into the conflict in Afghanistan, it can be argued that the Taliban insurgency has evolved both operationally and in terms of its impact on efforts to extend security and reconstruction throughout Afghanistan. Congress might decide to examine the current state of the insurgency and its potential for further growth and evolution, and U.S. and NATO efforts to address this evolution. Reports suggest that insurgent attacks have more than doubled over the past six months, now numbering more than 600 attacks per month resulting in at least 3,700 military and civilian deaths in 2006.⁶² This pattern of attacks reportedly “threatens to reverse some of the gains made in the past, with development activities being especially hard-hit in several areas, resulting in partial or total withdrawal of international agencies in a number of the worst-affected provinces.”⁶³

The nature of insurgent operations suggests that the Taliban insurgency continues to evolve. Some military officials concede that despite Coalition offensive operations, the insurgency has grown stronger.⁶⁴ The insurgency now attacks in larger groups, mounting more sophisticated and audacious operations that often feature coordinated fires and maneuvers. The insurgents also have displayed a tenacity that was not present in past operations by pressing their attacks as opposed to past “hit and run” attacks. It can be argued that these operational characteristics represent a Taliban insurgency that has improved its militarily effectiveness over the past five years of conflict, despite repeated attempts by Coalition ground and air forces to destroy it.

Adequacy of the Afghan National Army

Congress might consider reviewing the U.S. government’s commitment to building and supporting an effective Afghan National Army—a prerequisite for the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan. The Administration appears to be supporting a 50,000 soldier Afghan National Army as opposed to the 70,000 soldier force that it committed to in 2002. Critics of this policy suggest that it is based on a desire to cut costs and does not take into account the current situation where insurgents are stepping up both conventional attacks and explosive device and suicide attacks against Coalition forces. In addition, some analysts maintain that a 50,000 soldier force would be inadequate to confront the insurgency and defend Afghanistan’s western border with Iran. Some suggest that such an approach, which might make sense from a short-term financial perspective, could result in an undermanned Afghan National Army and require an indefinite commitment of U.S. and foreign troops to provide for Afghanistan’s security needs.

Beyond national security, some suggest that success of the Afghan National Army is important for other reasons.⁶⁵ Some maintain that Afghanistan has no unifying institutions, that the Karzai

⁶⁰ Ann Scott Tyson, “Marine Unit is Told to Leave Afghanistan,” *Washington Post*, March 24, 2007.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Jason Straziuso, “Attacks by Afghan Insurgents Multiply,” *USA Today*, November 13, 2006.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Dave Zucchino, “Afghan Army Could Help Unify a Nation,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 13, 2006.

⁶⁵ Information in this section is taken from Dave Zucchino, “Afghan Army Could Help Unify a Nation,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 13, 2006.

government controls Kabul but not much more; that the Afghan National Police are a fundamentally corrupt organization; and that in the rural areas of Afghanistan, druglords and warlords are in charge. Some view the multi-tribal Afghan National Army as a “good place to start” to build Afghan national loyalty.

Inadequate Equipment for the Afghan National Army

With numerous reports from U.S. officials citing the poor state of the Afghan National Army in terms of equipment, it is possible that Congress might examine how the United States and NATO and Coalition countries plan to improve the equipment posture of the Afghan National Army. Taliban insurgent forces are said to be better equipped than their ANA counterparts, who reportedly ride into battle in “Ford Ranger pick up trucks, with no body armor or helmets, and who communicate with cellphones.”⁶⁶ Many analysts see little prospect for success if the ANA is not properly equipped and supported.

Counternarcotics Operations

The current U.S. military policy on counternarcotics operations and NATO’s limited mandate for participating in counternarcotics operations may come under congressional scrutiny. While “burning poppy fields” and conducting combat operations on narcotics-related facilities might be too extreme a course of action for U.S. and NATO troops, a more active role short of direct action might have an impact on insurgent activities. According to one report, while the solution to the illegal opium problem requires an interdisciplinary approach due to the central role opium production plays in Afghanistan’s economy, NATO [and U.S. forces] should play a greater role “in targeting drug laboratories, opium stockpiles, and trafficking routes” as this would “not only help Afghan counternarcotics efforts but also curtails the flow of drugs to Europe, which gets 90 percent of its heroin from Afghanistan.”⁶⁷ Opponents of a more active U.S. and NATO counternarcotics role could argue that these efforts would shift resources and focus away from helping to stabilize the security situation, which could undermine the credibility of the Afghan central government.

Additional Reading

CRS Report RL30588, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy*, by Kenneth Katzman.

CRS Report RL32686, *Afghanistan: Narcotics and U.S. Policy*, by Christopher M. Blanchard.

CRS Report RL33627, *NATO in Afghanistan: A Test of the Transatlantic Alliance*, by Vincent Morelli and Paul Belkin.

CRS Report RL33110, *The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Global War on Terror Operations Since 9/11*, by Amy Belasco.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ali A. Jalali, “The Future of Afghanistan,” *Parameters: U.S. Army War College Quarterly*, Spring 2006, p. 6.

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